

From report to court – crimes against older people

Investigating whether a victim's age affects the criminal justice process.

Key details

Lead institution	Durham University
Principal researcher(s)	Dr Hannah Bows hannah.bows@durham.ac.uk
Police region	North East
Collaboration and partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College of Policing • Ministry of Justice • HM Courts and Tribunal Service (HMCTS) • His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) • Crown Prosecution Service • Greater Manchester Police • Northumbria Police • Victims' Commissioner • Action on Elder Abuse
Level of research	Professional/work based
Project start date	March 2020
Date due for completion	November 2023

Research context

Improving evidence for the scale of criminal victimisation of older people has garnered political and policymaker attention. The previous Home Secretary declared crimes against older people as a priority and commissioned a Home Office seminar series on crime against older people.

Practitioners and academics from across England and Wales were invited to discuss its prevalence and the key issues.

An HMICFRS inspection of police responses to crimes against vulnerable adults – including older adults who are vulnerable due to personal characteristics or circumstances – concluded there were improvements to be made in relation to police responses to older victims.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) has reviewed their existing guidance on prosecuting crimes against older people. The Victims of Crime All-Party Parliamentary Group is drafting a new Victims Bill.

Crimes against older people is therefore an emerging area of interest and there is a need to develop evidence to inform policy and practice.

The National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) is currently developing an ageing and crime strategy. Along with the College of Policing, they are supportive of this research and sit on the project steering group.

Research methodology

Stage one – Report to court tracking

Research question one: How do cases involving victims age 60 and over progress through the criminal justice system?

Cases being sampled are 250 cases reported to the police during September 2020 that involve a victim aged 60 and over. Victim, offender and offence characteristics (gender, age, ethnicity, mental health, nature and location of offence) will be analysed as well as the attrition points. This will enable examination attrition (drop out) points, and whether case progression is differentiated by any victim or crime characteristics.

As well as outcome data (the final stage each case reaches), information on the crime (crime type, location, time of day), alleged victim and offender (sex, age, ethnicity, disability, relationship profile, employment status) will be captured.

The status of the investigation and stage of the case will be captured each month along with any reasons/decisions for a case not progressing. This data will be analysed in the statistical software platform SPSS. This will examine if any variables were significant in terms of progression and outcome through bivariate and multivariate analysis.

Stage two – Qualitative interviews with decision makers and victims

Research question two: Does victim age affect police and prosecution decision making?

Fifty semi-structured, qualitative interviews will be conducted with key criminal justice practitioners (police officers and prosecutors) involved in cases analysed. This will assess whether victim age influenced decision making.

A stratified sampling technique will be used to ensure interviews capture cases across all stages of the criminal justice process.